



MY TEMPLE RECOMMEND HAD Expired

By Julie Wright

I could only sit by and watch as the young women I was supposed to be leading entered the temple without me.

I left the building quickly and took long strides to put some distance between the stone walls and myself. I didn't break into sobs until I had rounded the corner where no one could see me. I sat down and let myself wallow in self-pity for a moment. All I could do was wait for our youth group to finish performing baptisms for the dead. How could I have been so foolish?

It had been a long time since my last visit to the temple because I lived a good distance away. I had wanted to go for months, and chaperoning the young women on this trip had given me a reason to *make* the time.

I had entered the temple lobby feeling fine. Although the past year had been difficult, I felt that all the trials and stress had refined me into a better person. I felt prepared—like I was genuinely striving to do the things Heavenly Father wanted me to do. I went to the temple fasting, anticipating an outpouring of the Lord's Spirit there in His house.

At the recommend desk, an older gentleman in white smiled as he took my recommend, and then he frowned. "It's expired," he said and handed it back.

"It's expired?" I echoed incredulously. I looked toward the tiny entrance to the baptistry. It was filled with young men and young women as well as the leaders, one of the bishop's counselors, and my husband. I desperately wanted to move forward. But how could I with an expired recommend? My mind raced. Certainly the situation was due to an error, I thought. Perhaps during my interview the stake president had handed me the old recommend instead of the new one when he was done signing it. There was no way it could be expired. It hadn't been that long.





Or had it? I stretched my memory to find the last time I had taken the time to go to the temple. It had been long enough that I couldn't remember. I finally faced the truth. I hadn't checked the date on my recommend. It had expired, and now I couldn't enter the house of the Lord.

At that moment I felt a kinship to those 10 virgins awaiting the bridegroom (see Matthew 25:1–13). They all had invitations to attend the wedding celebration, but there were five who were not truly prepared. But the bridegroom didn't come right away. Eventually, when the 10 virgins heard the bridegroom was coming they all stood to trim their lamps. Five of the 10 virgins had thought ahead and brought extra oil to replenish their lamps. Five had not. Their oil burned out. They started the evening out right and were partway there. But, as my grandma used to tell me, when you're drowning it doesn't matter that you swam most of the way across the ocean. In the end, being partway isn't good enough.

When the bridegroom arrived late and the five foolish virgins *weren't* prepared, they asked to borrow oil from the five wise virgins. But the answer was no. When I was younger I

used to think the five wise virgins were selfish. Why couldn't they hand over a bit of oil? I've since realized that some things can't be shared, just as none of my friends could have shared their temple recommends with me so that I could enter the temple.

I imagine those five foolish women standing on the wrong side of the door feeling sorrow and embarrassment. We have no indication they were evil people. They had been worthy to receive invitations to the wedding celebration, but they were not fully prepared.

How foolish.

I certainly felt foolish. I wasn't an evil or bad person. I just wasn't as prepared as I thought. As a result, my husband had to go on without me. It felt symbolic, that moment of being left behind, that moment of being turned away when I yearned to go inside.

Unlike the five foolish virgins, I had a second chance. Because I was spiritually prepared to enter the temple, I could be interviewed, renew the recommend, and come back another time. And I would treasure the lesson I had learned about always being sure my lamp was properly trimmed and about having extra oil. ■



LIVE WORTHY OF A TEMPLE RECOMMEND

Live worthy to hold a temple recommend. There is nothing more precious than a temple recommend. . . . Whether you can go there frequently or not, qualify for a temple recommend and keep a recommend in your pocket. It will be a reminder to you of what is expected of you as a Latter-day Saint."

President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008), "Inspirational Thoughts," *Ensign*, Apr. 2002, 4.